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June 17, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT

June 17, 1959

Others present:

Secretary McElroy  
Secretary Dillon  
Mr. Gordon Gray  
General Goodpaster

The President said he had asked Mr. McElroy and Mr. Dillon to come in to talk to them a little about the subject of bases in foreign countries, with specific reference to discussions regarding IRBM bases in Greece. He said he could see reason for putting IRBMs into such areas as Britain, Germany and France. However, when it comes to the "flank" or advanced areas such as Greece, the matter seems very questionable. He reverted to his analogy -- if Cuba or Mexico were to become Communist inclined, and the Soviets were to send arms and equipment, what would we feel we had to do then. He thought we would feel that we would have to intervene, militarily if necessary.

A further question is as to the long-term implications. He sees the problem we have built for ourselves regarding our bases in Morocco, Libya and other places. These impose a "political drain" on us -- a constant burden and handicap on our foreign affairs.

All this, in his opinion, should be studied. He would like to see the JCS and the State Department make a very thorough analysis of this across the board. He added that the same kind of problem does not seem to arise for the shorter range or tactical missiles such as the Redstone, the Honest John and the Corporal.

Mr. McElroy commented that we must consider the question against the Soviet threats to obliterate Western Europe. It was the situation resulting from threats such as these that led us to offer these IRBMs to our allies, who were showing signs of being shaken by the threat.

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The President said that a further point of question in his mind is that of putting our reserves so far forward, in exposed areas in which they would be hard to defend. He repeated that the problem is different in the UK, France, Holland and Spain, adding that there is not the need to help these countries economically, other than Spain. He recognized that the recent French actions and attitudes do tend to force us into deployments in other areas, such as Greece and Turkey.

Mr. Dillon said it would be a very serious matter to back down on our plans at the moment, apparently under threat from Khrushchev. Also, if we were to treat Greece and Turkey differently in NATO from other countries, we would encounter great difficulty, especially with Turkey.

The President said it is regrettable that we seem to have to say exactly what weapons we are putting in specific places. The Russians are not so handicapped. Mr. Dillon said we could not successfully conceal such facts; they would leak out.

Mr. Dillon added the point that the State Department would be agreeable to "bargaining" the presence of IRBMs in Greece with the Soviets, as against equivalent Soviet concessions, for example as an element in a disarmament package. He felt we can push the Soviets toward willingness to consider disarmament seriously if these weapons are in fact deployed near them.



The President commented that this deployment does not seem to serve to reduce tensions between ourselves and the Soviets. He also recalled that he and Secretary Dulles had stressed in December 1957 at the NATO meeting that we were not attempting to force our weapons on our NATO partners. Only if the Greeks asked for them should they be provided. They must genuinely want these weapons, taking account of their public opinion problems. He further commented that we should make sure that our lower staffs in the Mutual Security Program, etc., are not pressing the Greeks to take the IRBMs.

At this point I showed the President a message in from our NATO representatives, indicating that General Norstad would be agreeable

to stating that the IRBMs are being provided to Greece in response to NATO military necessity but only if the Greeks themselves genuinely want them -- he does not want to appear to be pressing them on the matter. I also commented that one difference between this situation and the analogy the President had used earlier is that no one feels that the United States has expansionist aims toward its neighbors whereas NATO came into existence because of the threats and expansionist efforts by the Soviets beginning with Greece and Turkey in 1947, and involving other Western European countries as well.

Mr. Dillon recalled that the Greek Foreign Minister had asked if Mr. Herter could visit Athens on leaving Geneva, and that Mr. Herter had suggested that he send a message instead. The President asked that it be made clear in the message that we have made an offer of these weapons, and that the choice now is wholly up to the Greeks. Mr. Dillon pointed out certain changes in the proposed message to make it clear that there is no question of bases for the United States in Greece.

Mr. McElroy returned to the point that it is not desirable to turn down this program after the threat from Khrushchev. The President said he thought it would be all right to delay action as long as might be thought advisable. He strongly agreed that any delay should not be related to Khrushchev's threats.

Dwight D. Eisenhower  
A. J. Goodpaster  
Brigadier General, USA